

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Case File No.: AA-83229

AK-040-01-EA-026

Applicant: Alaska Railroad Corporation  
P.O. Box 10-7500  
327 West Ship Creek Avenue  
Anchorage, Alaska 99501

Type of  
Action: Non-competitive Mineral Materials Sale

Location: Sec. 35, T. 14 N., R. 3 W., Seward Meridian

Prepared By: Carl Persson, Geologist

Preparing  
Office: Bureau of Land Management  
Anchorage Field Office  
6881 Abbott Loop Road  
Anchorage, Alaska 99507

Date: July 12, 2001

## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action:

The Alaska Railroad Corporation is proposing to realign approximately ten miles of railroad track on Elmendorf Air Force Base and Fort Richardson. The original track alignment was built in 1914. The purpose of the track realignment is to improve safety of railroad operations, reduce travel time, improve the level of current service, and reduce operating cost. This will be accomplished by removing a number of excessive curves, effectively straightening the route. Wilder Construction Company has received the contract to construct the new railroad bed. An environmental assessment was prepared for the entire project, and the Decision Record signed on May 9, 2000 (BLM EA 99-026).

A proposal was submitted by Wilder Construction on June 13, 2001, to mine 30,000 cubic yards of mineral materials from a staging area outside of the realignment Right-of-Way. Since the mineral materials are located outside of the Right-of-Way, the BLM is required to sell the material at fair market value. On July 3, 2001, Wilder modified the proposal by requesting 70,000 additional cubic yards of material, for a total of 100,000 cubic yards. On July 10, 2001, the Alaska Railroad Corporation applied for an additional 35,000 to 50,000 cubic yards of gravel material to be used on a different component of the railroad realignment project.

### B. Conformance With Land Use Plan:

This Proposed Action is subject to the Southcentral MFP, which was approved in March 1980. The Proposed Action has been reviewed for conformance with this plan (43 CFR 1610.5, BLM MS 1617.3).

### C. Relationship to Statutes, Regulations, Policies, Plans or Other Environmental Analyses:

The subject mineral material sale is in conformance with 43 CFR 3600 regulations which contain the rules and procedures for mineral material sales. Additional information is contained within the Track Realignment Project Environmental Assessment, Number 99-026, pages 6-11.

## II. PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

### A. Proposed Action:

The Alaska Railroad Corporation proposes to mine 35,000 to 50,000 cubic yards of mineral materials from an area approximately 200 feet by 800 feet by 8.5 feet deep (not to exceed 10 feet deep). The mining would occur during the months of July and August 2001. The mining area is located along the railroad realignment route on Elmendorf AFB, Section 35, T. 14 N., R. 3 W., Seward Meridian, and is not part of the Railroad Right-of-Way land grant transfer. The site was originally designated as a staging area to produce the crushed rock products needed for the

alignment project and was also for disposal of excess excavation material (about 300,000 cubic yards). The total amount of material needed for aggregate processing for the project is approximately 150,000 cubic yards. However, due to job related delays and a higher than expected silt content of the material excavated from the Right-of-Way, the Alaska Railroad Corporation is unable to deliver rock material from the Right-of-Way to the crushing unit for processing as originally planned. Instead, the mineral materials mined from within a portion of the staging area will supply about 50,000 cubic yards of material to the crushing plant to make up for the shortfall of material from the Right-of-Way.

Reclamation of the staging area will follow the guidelines set forth in the Native Vegetation Restoration Plan. Approximately 400 trees will need to be removed which will be sold to the railroad at fair market value. The pit walls will be graded to a 2:1 slope. The pit will be reseeded to the standards listed in the Native Vegetation Restoration Plan, unless the Air Force requests that the pit remain open for future mineral material needs. Alternatively, the Air Force may choose to fill in the pit with silty gravel waste material from the Right-of-Way to ground level to be used in a future Christmas Tree farm. This plan was developed to implement the restoration requirements stipulated in BLM EA 99-026 for the Alaska Railroad Corporation Track Realignment Project.

B. No Action Alternative:

The BLM would deny the noncompetitive sale of mineral materials and the Alaska Railroad Corporation would need to find another source of mineral materials for the project.

II. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

A. Critical Elements:

The following critical elements are either not present or would not be affected by the Proposed Action or the No Action Alternative:

- Areas of Critical Environmental Concern
- Environmental Justice
- Farmlands, Prime or Unique
- Floodplains
- Invasive, Non-native Species
- Native American Religious Concerns
- Water Quality, Surface/Ground
- Wetlands/Riparian Zones
- Wild and Scenic Rivers
- Wilderness

1. Cultural Resources:

A cultural resources clearance report was completed on June 25, 2001. No cultural resources will be affected by the proposed action. Additional information is contained within the Track Realignment Project Environmental Assessment, Number 99-026, page 46.

2. Subsistence:

A Section 810 ANILCA Compliance/Clearance was completed for the entire railroad realignment project on December 2, 1999. Additional information is contained within the Track Realignment Project Environmental Assessment, Number 99-026, page 57.

3. T&E Species:

A threatened and endangered species evaluation was completed on June 22, 2001. No threatened or endangered species were identified within the project area. Additional information is contained within the Track Realignment Project Environmental Assessment, Number 99-026, page 45.

4. Wastes, Hazardous or Solid:

There are no known wastes on the site. However, due to past military use of the site, there is a remote possibility that hazardous wastes could be encountered during excavation of the material.

5. Air Quality:

The air quality of the project site is generally good, although the Anchorage area has been designated as a nonattainment area for carbon monoxide by the EPA.

B. Land Status:

This land is under withdrawal for a military reservation. The role of the BLM is to manage the vegetative and mineral resources. BLM issues land authorizations for this withdrawal, subject to the concurrence of the military. Further land status information is contained within the Track Realignment Project Environmental Assessment, Number 99-026, page 49.

- C. Vegetation:  
The site contains approximately 400 second growth trees consisting of spruce, birch and low lying willow trees. Additional information is contained within the Track Realignment Project Environmental Assessment, Number 99-026, page 34.
- D. Visual Resources:  
The site is located in an area that has already been disturbed. Visual quality has been impacted by extensive development in the area.
- E. Wildlife:  
The subject lands contain a thin second growth cover of black spruce, birch and low willow, which provides very little habitat for wildlife. The Environmental Site Officer for the project inspected the site and observed no bird nests or signs of active habitation by wildlife. Wildlife information of the surrounding area is contained within the Track Realignment Project Environmental Assessment, Number 99-026, pages 37-45.

#### IV. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

- A. Impacts of the Proposed Action:
  - 1. Critical Elements:
    - a. Cultural Resources:  
There are no impacts to cultural resources.
    - b. Water Quality, Surface/Ground:  
There are no surface waters within the project area. Ground waters should not be encountered in the excavation and therefore will not be impacted.
    - c. Wastes, Hazardous or Solid:  
Should potentially hazardous waste be found during excavation, all excavation activity shall cease until the waste can be assessed and specific permission given to restart excavation activities.
    - d. Air Quality:  
There will be temporary impacts to air quality by the pollutant emissions from vehicles, construction equipment and dust. The effects will quickly disappear after excavation is completed.
  - 2. Vegetation:  
The site contains approximately 400 second growth trees consisting of spruce, birch and low lying willow trees that will need to be removed. The

trees have limited commercial value and would be sold to the railroad at fair market value. No additional impacts to vegetation are expected.

3. Visual Resources:

There will be no change in visual quality.

4. Wildlife:

Wildlife in the immediate project vicinity will be temporarily relocated by the noise and activity generated from the excavation activities. Some minor habitat destruction will occur. Wildlife impacts are contained within the Track Realignment Project Environmental Assessment, Number 99-026, pages 68-72.

B. Impacts of the No Action Alternative:

Since the only alternative is to deny the mineral material sale request, the only impact of the No Action Alternative would be that the Alaska Railroad Corporation would need to find another source of mineral materials to complete the railroad realignment. This would increase the cost to complete the project by increasing the distance to move the mineral materials. Currently, there are no other proposed mineral material sites.

C. Cumulative Impacts:

The area has been impacted by the realignment project and the removal of the gravel in a small area will have a negligible cumulative impact.

D. Mitigation Measures:

Reclamation of the staging area will follow the guidelines set forth in the Native Vegetation Restoration Plan. This plan was developed to implement the restoration requirements stipulated in BLM EA 99-026 for the Alaska Railroad Corporation Track Realignment Project. Additionally, see the attached list of stipulations.

V. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

A. Persons and Agencies Consulted:

Brian Kovol, Project Biologist, URS Corporation

B. List of Preparers:

Carl Persson, BLM Geologist